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Nineteenth-Century American Housekeeping Books:
Women's Workplace Manuals
Historical Research in Technical Writing

by

Melanie C. Woods
B.A. University of Central Florida, 1994

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

This thesis analyzes three American housekeeping books—Lydia Maria Child’s *The American Frugal Housewife*, Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The American Woman’s Home*, and Helen Campbell Stuart’s *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking*—as historical examples of technical writing. The study follows current recommendations for historical research in the field, namely, to analyze technical writing texts in consideration of their historical context. This involves determining what constituted technical writing in the nineteenth century; considering the publishing context, including readers, writers, and publishing practices; defining technical writing for the context of the study; and applying this definition to analyze three housekeeping books as technical manuals. These texts exemplify technical writing based on their functional purpose, to help readers perform work. Additionally, they incorporate verbal and visual rhetorical strategies distinctive of technical writing. Since the majority of women in the nineteenth century worked in their homes, these books served as their workplace manuals.

This work is dedicated to all my friends and family who supported me in my work.

Acknowledgments

I want to recognize (in no particular order) and offer special thanks to people who gave me extra support in my research. Henrietta Nickels Shirk guided me toward historical research in technical writing by introducing me to works by early women scientists. Also, David Gillette, who directed this thesis, was obviously influential. Gail Lippincott enthusiastically shared ideas about research in this area and recommended sources for additional research.

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Recovering History in Technical Writing

Technical writing has been practiced for centuries, judging from examples of writing by Egyptian alchemists, mathematicians, and cosmologists produced over two thousand years ago. However, technical communication is a relatively new academic discipline, with college courses offered only during the last century (Connors 329-52). As it becomes increasingly established in academia, we are reassessing the role of historical research in the field. For instance, William E. Rivers notes that historical research “is indicative of a discipline that is reaching maturity” (45-46). Additionally, he notes the benefits of establishing a history of technical writing, which “should help us show our students that their study of writing and the writing they will do in their professional careers is the continuation of a rich, complex, and very old cultural tradition” (46). Understanding this tradition helps us make informed decisions about our writing, which in turn makes us more effective communicators. Additionally, producing a history of technical communication will enhance both the profession and the academic discipline, as well as expand our concepts of what constitutes technical writing. With particular emphasis on the latter, I submit a study of three housekeeping manuals from the nineteenth century to analyze how they are characteristic of technical writing and how they function as technical documents in light of their historical context.

Defining Terms

Now that the field is more firmly entrenched in academia, there is a call for more historical research. Most researchers of historical technical writing recall Michael Moran's 1985 declaration that "the history of technical writing has not been written" (25). Elizabeth Tebeaux mentions it as recently as 1997 in her book-length historical study, *Technical Writing in the English Renaissance, 1475-1690*. I, too, invoke Moran as I offer my contribution to this growing body of research. According to researchers such as Tebeaux, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, and Jennifer Connor, historical research reveals how technical writing not only provides readers with instruction or information "to do," but also serves as a primary means of socialization. For example, Tebeaux and Killingsworth note:

As technological craft extended its reach into new fields of social and personal life, the how-to manual followed as the key instrument of self-education among middle-class readers. Non-institutional technical writing thus became a primary means of socialization in a culture whose chief agents were individuals interested in maintaining a large measure of autonomy but nevertheless keenly sensitive to social demands for proper conduct, high moral standards, and socially productive behavior. (28)

Examining how technical writing reflects the time period in which it was written provides insights about its writers and readers, and, reciprocally, allows us to hypothesize about the writing's rhetorical effects on its readers. But the above-mentioned experts warn us to

fully understand the historical, intellectual, and social context of a historical text before attempting to analyze it; failure to do so results in erroneous conclusions derived from applying a contemporary perspective. For instance, Connor states, "Strictly limiting stylistic analysis of historical text to the remaining words on the page, without fully understanding the context in which it appeared and was received, is no longer a valid form of scholarship in several fields" (220). So, examining technical writing in its historical context will also broaden our understanding of history, allowing us insights about daily life from a fresh perspective.

The key to discovering historical technical writing lies in expanding our concept of work-related writing. Obviously, people living in the past, even as recently as the nineteenth-century, did not "work" in the sense that we know today; in other words, many were not gainfully employed outside the home. However, they *did* work, and there were books offering practical advice to help them with their work, covering topics such as carpentry, cooking, farming, medicine, surveying, and animal husbandry. Referring to a survey of historical books on topics like these, Tebeaux and Killingsworth comment, "Technical writing, even in the Renaissance, can be found that dealt with topics necessary to perform work" (25). Therefore, taking into account the different ways people worked in the past allows us to consider a broad range of practical texts as historical technical writing.

Initially, my interest in this project stemmed from a desire to recover early technical writing by American women. In doing so, I wanted to find writing that perhaps had not previously been considered technical writing and designate it as such in light of its

historical context. My preliminary research lead me to writing by women scientists, whose work I felt was largely unknown to the general population and therefore worth recovering. However, their writing was more appropriately categorized as science or scientific writing. To clarify, science writing is generally writing about science topics geared toward a general audience, such as a field guide for plants or a reference book on minerals. Scientific writing is writing within the discourse community of scientists, typically written by scientists for other scientists, such as academic papers or reports publishing the findings from their research. [For the sake of discussion, I will refer to both as science writing, since my study ultimately focuses on technical writing.] For my study, I wanted to find writing more characteristic of technical writing.

What is Technical Writing?

In noting my distinction of technical writing, I realize I am venturing into the murky waters of defining technical communication. The field is struggling to define itself: we have anthologies entirely devoted to this topic (see Jones' *Defining Technical Communication*). To summarize, technical writing is frequently defined by describing its characteristics, such as style, format, organization, content, and purpose. Elements of style associated with technical writing are its specialized vocabulary and sentence structures, such as declarative sentences using a subject-verb-object arrangement or imperative commands. In technical writing, style reflects the writer's rhetorical consideration to convey information accurately and clearly. Technical writing frequently differs in appearance from other types of writing, demonstrating extensive formatting, such as

headings, indexes, and white space, to enhance accessibility and readability. Additionally, technical writing is often organized using rhetorical strategies to motivate the audience, such as placing the most important information first. It is also organized for cohesion, placing preliminary or familiar content before the new, which helps readers learn unfamiliar concepts.

Another feature of technical writing is that its content is primarily technical, pertaining to or derived from technique. (see David N. Dobrin's "What's Technical About Technical Writing?") Briefly noted, Dobrin concludes that a definition for technical writing should focus on "technological practices" (110). In short, a "technical" content means the subject is about or concerned with technology. It is helpful to consider purpose along with content, because the purpose of technical writing is often to convey technology to the readers. Generally speaking, the purpose of technical writing is to motivate readers to either learn something or, particularly, to perform some action. For this reason, we consider technical writing as grounded in the rhetoric of persuasion.

Additionally, technical writing is often distinguished from other types of writing in that it is not written to be deliberately "artful." In his essay examining the differences among technical, creative, and expository writing, Charles Stratton notes a distinguishing characteristic of technical writing: "it is writing as an act of communication rather than writing as an act of self-expression" (39). This is not to say that technical writing lacks creativity, because the very employment of rhetorical strategies necessary in technical writing is a creative process in itself. However, technical writing's primary aim is not to convey language for artistic expression, which is an objective of both creative and

expository writing. To clarify, Stratton notes that creative writing highlights the relationship between writer and subject, expository writing emphasizes the link between writer and reader, whereas technical writing is *instrumental*, facilitating information from reader to subject (40-41). So, technical writing is often characterized by its lack of deliberate artfulness.

One problem with defining the genre is the diverse, even contradictory, examples attributed to technical communication; it becomes difficult to find a common denominator among them. Perhaps this explains why we *describe* characteristics, as I just did, to define technical writing. And as soon as someone presents a reasonable-sounding definition, someone else challenges it. For example, many object to defining technical communication as “information conveyed clearly” because they dispute the concept of objectivity in *any* writing (see Miller and Rutter, for example). We additionally cloud the waters by debating what genres constitute technical writing: is technical writing a genre of science writing or vice versa?

I have no illusions about issuing the final word on this debate; however, for the sake of discussion, I must establish some working definitions. Generally speaking—because we will never get anywhere if I discuss *all* of the exceptions—I note a difference between technical and science writing. So do others, such as Tebeaux and Killingsworth, who note, “scientific writing and technical writing are often (but not always) two distinct entities” (6). Distinguishing between the subjects of technical writing (technology) and science writing (science) helps clarify this difference. Miller illustrates:

It is true that modern science and technology are intertwined and greatly dependent on each other. But they are distinct activities—arising from distinct motivations, judged by distinct criteria, and requiring distinct set of values. Rhetorical analysis which recognizes this distinction is potentially more penetrating, more accurate, and more helpful as criticism. (228)

To clarify, she defines science as “the study of the universal to achieve verifiable understanding” and technology as “the manipulation of the contingent and local to achieve material results” (228).

A significant way technical writing differs from science writing is in its rhetorical purpose as *writing to do*. Writers such as Dobrin, Daniel Marder, and William McCarron have defined technical writing by its motivational purpose. McCarron illustrates the difference between science and technical writing:

Science writing is for scientists; ads on the Apple IIe are for you and me. A technical discussion, deeply technical, on boolean algebra, network theory, logic circuitry is for the computer technologist. It is science writing for scientists. The Apple IIe user manuals . . . are technical writing. These manuals, not all of them as clearly written as you might think, are means between the catchy ad and the pure science of schematic diagrams. So is a tactics book written for fighter pilots that discusses probabilities of using the lead computing optical sight on the F-16 gun in a certain tracking solution. An in-depth explanation of the mathematics of trajectory shift, the

physics of bullet terminal velocity, and the aerodynamic theory of angle of attack is not. That is the stuff of engineers. It is scientific writing meant for an audience of experts. (61-62)

In short, science writing is theoretical; it presents theories, hypotheses, and results of research. Technical writing is similarly educational, in its aim to inform, but its focus is more applied. Its purpose is functional: to motivate readers toward some action. A large amount of technical writing enables readers to perform tasks, such as procedures and step-by-step instructions. Because of this task-oriented nature, technical writing uses different rhetorical strategies than science writing. The purpose is to learn to do something, not to learn the theory behind the practice. This characteristic distinguishes technical writing from science writing; furthermore, this motivational purpose is common to all types of technical writing. For that reason, I use that feature as the essence of my working definition. And that feature is common to historical texts that can be considered technical writing, as Tebeaux and Killingsworth note: "Technical writing, in any age, will be writing that enables readers to perform tasks associated with their work in their particular society" (8).

In establishing my working definition, I realized it must be applicable to historical texts, so in preliminary research, I noted the features that seemed characteristic of historical technical writing. I also considered the features noted by other researchers who have examined historical technical writing, which I will discuss later in my work. As we will see, many of the features considered hallmarks of effective technical writing today are

present in historical texts as well. So, to look at historical technical writing, I am limiting my definition of technical writing as:

- Writing that helps people perform work, “writing to do.”
- Writing that informs, but with a focus on applied technology, “technological practices,” rather than theory.
- Writing that incorporates rhetorical elements, such as style, format, and organization, to achieve its motivational purpose.
- Writing that is not deliberately artful.

I caution readers to remember that this definition is meant to be considered within the context of this work, and its elements are co-dependent: they work together to provide an analogue for examining the historical examples in this study.

Why Consider Ideology?

Examining how a text reflects the time period in which it was written provides insights about its writers and readers, and, reciprocally, allows us to hypothesize about the writing’s rhetorical effects on its readers. But first, we must understand the text’s context, and this requires historical research. Because researching the history of America in the nineteenth century would be an enormous endeavor, I restricted my focus by asking, “What was daily life like for American housekeepers during the nineteenth century?” This is still a large area, in terms of scholarship. Especially useful were books on the history of housekeeping, such as Ruth Cowan’s *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*; Harvey Green’s *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America*; Glenna Matthews’ *Just a Housewife: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*; and Susan Strasser’s

Never Done: A History of American Housework. Also helpful was Nicole Tonkovich's *Domesticity With a Difference*, examining the lives and works of nineteenth-century domestic writers. These books offered remarkable insights into the prevailing culture, technology, and ideology of the time. Understanding the ideology of a given time period seems especially crucial for situating a text in its historical context. Perhaps this is because a discussion of ideology seems to require a retrospective perspective.

While the focus here is not primarily on ideology, we cannot overlook it because an understanding of a time period's ideology can be illuminating when analyzing historical texts. However, "ideology" is a troublesome term, perhaps as difficult to define as technical writing because it conjures a wide range of connotations and vague associations. Again, I have established a working definition for the context of my work. First, consider Strasser's discussion of ideology:

Beecher's books and the other advice literature constitute an ideology about housework, a set of doctrines about women's work that must be studied in conjunction with information about household technology and economic development . . . this literature shapes people's reality; it is also shaped by it. (xv)

Generally, ideology is the body of ideas, encompassing values, concerns, opinions, philosophies, and political ideas, that reflects the social inclinations of an individual, group, class, or culture.

In the housekeeping manuals in this study, all three writers clearly have their own approaches toward their subject matter, which is evident in their writing. These

approaches are informed by the ideology of their respective eras. In other words, what the authors write is affected by their attitudes, which have been shaped by social forces, toward their readers. Analyzing their prescriptions for women reveals that these authors reflect the ideology of a larger social order. For instance, the authors' individual claims, such as the duty and benefits of keeping busy, exemplify a larger belief in the Protestant work ethic. It is important to note that any presence of ideology in these books is evidence of rhetorical underpinnings. In other words, ideology affects how the writers write: it affects their style. For instance, Moran discusses Steven Del Sesto's article on values in science writing on nuclear energy:

With the advent of nuclear energy in the 1940s, journalists and technical writers had to popularize its peacetime uses after the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The 1940s and 1950s saw a flood of sensational, grandiose, and fantastic claims for the new energy source that emphasized its contribution to medicine, transportation, industry, and agriculture. (34)

Likewise, the presence of ideology in a text informs us about the period. Therefore, an understanding of ideology is especially beneficial for situating texts in their historical environment. For this study, it is important to consider prevailing nineteenth-century ideology when reading the historical texts, and I will do this in the context of my work. Rather than focus on it, however, I will note its presence, especially in terms of its effects on the writing.

Delineating Scope

My study involves examining three housekeeping manuals from the nineteenth century: *The American Frugal Housewife* (1829) by Lydia Maria Child, *The American Woman's Home* (1869) by sisters Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking* (1881) by Helen Stuart Campbell. I intend to show how these books functioned as technical manuals for the women who used them to perform work in the home. I will establish how these texts exemplify technical writing in their purpose and characteristics by situating these books in their historical context. I intend to eschew a completely evolutionary viewpoint (for example, current technical writing is more evolved, superior than earlier technical writing), in favor of a more balanced approach to appreciate the rhetorical strategies that were appropriate given the historical environment. In other words, were these technical manuals effective for their nineteenth-century readers? To answer this question, I will provide overviews of nineteenth-century ideology and publishing practices specific to housekeeping books. Then, using my definition of technical writing, I will examine each of the three books for format, organization, style, ideology, and technical content, specifically, to see how the writers convey contemporary technological practices to their readers. In Campbell's case, I alter the method of presentation, because as we will see, her writing represents an ideological shift from the cult of domesticity prevalent in earlier books to the ethos of scientific management increasingly common at the turn of the century.

My study examines books written during the nineteenth century, to both compare and contrast a range of technical manuals written during different periods of the century.

They are representative only in that they were all successful books, noted by their multiple printings, but perhaps most importantly, in that they embody the prevailing attitudes of their particular time period. And while an analysis of three books is appropriate to the limitations of my study, a more comprehensive investigation, comparing a larger number of housekeeping manuals, would be useful to fully consider the characteristics of this genre of technical writing. A study of this scope would certainly be possible, because there were a number of housekeeping manuals published in the 1800s, particularly in the second half of the century. Similarly, comparing housekeeping manuals to other types of advice literature, or other writing from the era, would place these works in context and also offer additional insights into nineteenth-century technical writing.

What Do We Know About Other Nineteenth-Century Technical Writing?

In the nineteenth century, America had many forms of technical writing, including guides, articles, manuals, pamphlets, and treatises. However, there are currently no inclusive studies of nineteenth-century technical writing, so it is difficult to generalize about other types of technical writing without doing an exhaustive survey that would be beyond the scope of my study. However, there is a small body of historical research in technical writing from this time period. To illustrate, in R. John Brockmann's 1983 bibliography of studies on the history of technical writing, only seven of the thirty-six listed concentrate on the nineteenth century, and the majority of those focus on an individual text or writer, presumably because most of the works are article-length. Worth noting, all of the writers examined in these studies have been men. The number of works

devoted to nineteenth-century writing is essentially the same in a similar bibliographic essay from 1994 by William E. Rivers, which is ultimately a larger study (200 works) because of the additional historical research devoted to other time periods, but also because he includes citations on historical research in business writing. A significant addition to historical research in the field is the 1997 summer issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly*, devoted to feminist research into *women* technical writers from the past. Of the six essays in that issue, none specifically focus on nineteenth-century writing, although two focus on writers from the early twentieth century (see Haller and Madaus). In *TCQ*'s fall 1997 issue, an article by Gail Lippincott examines the writing of Ellen Swallow Richards from the late nineteenth century.

Not surprisingly, there is a call for additional research. Tebeaux and Killingsworth suggest a need for larger studies to examine as many kinds of technical writing as possible for a specific time period (27). Rivers recommends the need to focus on neglected time periods, noting that most work has concentrated on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British writing. Like Tebeaux and Killingsworth, he suggests larger studies that incorporate multidisciplinary approaches. Similarly, he calls for placing historical studies in context, illustrating the connections between technical writing and all writing from a particular time period and ultimately analyzing how writing has evolved over time (45). In the essay that opens the special edition of *TCQ*, Katherine T. Durack suggests that the reason why women's writing has been absent from the history of technical writing is that notions of *work*, *workplace*, and *technology* are gendered terms. Because women's (unpaid) work took place in the home, which was not considered a workplace, writing

associated with their work has not been considered technical writing. She notes: "If we are to include the accomplishments of women in the history of technical communication, I believe we must challenge the dualistic thinking that severs public and private, household and industry, and masculine and feminine labor" (257). She concludes by suggesting new ways of defining technical writing to include women's writing in the discipline's history: "As we construct this history, a major challenge will be to examine why we deem certain artifacts *technology*, their attendant activities *work*, their place of conduct the *workplace*, and therefore find reason to include associated writings within the corpus *history of technical writing*" (258).

Reviewing the historical research that has focused on the nineteenth century reveals the characteristics particular to technical writing from this time period. All of the studies surveyed are article-length, so they focus on one text or an individual writer. For example, Brockmann examines the writing of one of the earliest-known technical writers to make a living at his profession. In his article "Victor W. Pagé's Early Twentieth-Century Automotive and Aviation Books," Brockmann comments on the features that make Pagé's books successful sellers and effective technical writing: audience consideration to establish ethos; timely, complete coverage of new technology; numerous illustrations; easily accessed information (the use of headings, table of contents, and indexes); and a task-oriented approach. Particular to the era, Pagé's books are long, typically over five hundred pages long. However, his books are formatted for accessibility, which Brockmann notes shows consideration for readers who "read technical manuals selectively and not cover to cover" (291).

Similarly, Donald W. Bush, Jr. notes effective technical writing in a short description of a safety lamp in "The Diction of Sir Humphrey Davy." Davy wrote the five-page article to describe his safety lamp in 1816. Bush notes, "Despite the cumbersome length of his sentences, the message is clear. It is clear not only because of his logical organizational sequence, but also because of his excellent diction—his choice of words for correctness, clearness, and effectiveness" (32). He also notes Davy's use of active voice and concrete words, which enhance the precision, clarity, and economy of his writing.

Likewise, Stephen L. Gresham's "George Washington Carver and the Art of Technical Communication" examines Carver's agricultural bulletins that demonstrate basic principles of technical writing, including a clear sense of purpose—with emphasis on the practical, careful audience analysis, and effective use of style and rhetorical strategies. Specifically, Gresham notes Carver's clear writing style, exemplified in his precise prose and his lucid descriptions. He organizes some of his bulletins into a question and answer format, with questions that area farmers were likely to ask and answers that are "clear, direct, and positive" (220). Carver's writing also shows a commitment to audience consideration in his use of familiar terms so that his readers, mostly farmers, can easily understand his material; similarly, he delineates his scope appropriately, to keep from overwhelming his readers with overly technical material. Gresham concludes that Carver's main achievement "was that he created a verbal culture through which scientific and technical information could be transmitted to his audience of area farmers" (224).

In Shari A. and Patrick M. Kelley's "Sir Charles Lyell: Geologist and Technical Communicator," the authors discuss the effective use of style in Lyell's geology writing,

allowing him to convey technical information to a diverse audience as well as communicate controversial information to an antagonistic audience. Lyell achieves his clear style through use of active voice, parallelism, and repetition of simple, precise terms. Additionally, he employs a disarming tone to deliver a controversial theory that conflicted with widely-held opinions of the time period, humbly noting that his is simply “a different conclusion” (40). His use of both style and tone reveal consideration of his audience, too.

Mary Lay examines John Snow’s “The Prevention of Cholera,” written in 1824, in the article “A Classical Example of a Procedure.” Lay suggests that Snow’s procedure exemplifies good technical writing: “Although his sentences are longer and his style more formal than we think appropriate today, his procedure serves well as a model” (40). He analyzes his audience and purpose carefully to coordinate the efforts of all the medical and government personnel who might be involved in the procedure. He includes concrete details, because he cannot be certain who will perform each step in the procedure. Lay suggests it is for this reason that he uses passive voice, to emphasize the action rather than the person who will perform it, because the task is more important.

In a slightly different study, Deborah Kilgore contends, “*Moby-Dick* is a classic of technical literature as well as a classic of American literature” (209) in her article “*Moby-Dick*: A Whale of a Handbook for Technical Writing Teachers.” She suggests that teachers of technical writing could use Herman Melville’s literary classic as a handbook to teach students concepts about purpose, research, audience consideration, use of personal experience, and accuracy and thoroughness in gathering information. The novel also provides effective models of definitions, descriptions, processes, theories, and metaphoric

writing. Kilgore presents a convincing argument to consider the novel as a technical manual on whaling.

Gail Lippincott's article "Experimenting at Home: Writing for the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Workplace" examines writing by Ellen Swallow Richards, a nineteenth-century scientist. In 1878, the Massachusetts State Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity commissioned Richards to determine the level of adulterations in foods. From that study, Richards eventually wrote four documents: a report for the Board of Health, two books for lay audiences, and a journal article for other scientists. Lippincott studies the rhetorical strategies of these four documents, focusing in particular on Richards's audience awareness, demonstrated by the way she creates texts geared for specific readers. In this regard, Lippincott concludes, ". . . her writing anticipates current technical communication practices in audience analysis. . . ." (376).

All of these studies into nineteenth-century technical writing reveal similar characteristics in the examined writing:

- technical or scientific subject matter.
- informed audience analysis.
- a purpose to communicate to readers, to motivate them to perform a task.
- use of appropriate rhetorical strategies to fulfill the writers' purpose.
- use of format and organization to help readers access information.
- clear style, characterized by precise terms and logical organization.
- attention to accuracy and detail.

Although the amount of historical research in this era is small, the writers have carefully analyzed their specific texts, allowing us to make some generalizations about the characteristics of technical writing in the nineteenth century. In this short sample, there are several forms of technical writing, including books, articles, pamphlets, reports, and

procedures. The topics are geared toward helping readers perform tasks related to mechanics, mining, agriculture, geology, health, whaling, chemistry, and nutrition. Note that most of these subject areas pertain to male professions. Similarly, most of the writers studied have been men. A starting point for additional research into the technical writing of the nineteenth century would be to find other examples of work-related writing, especially those focusing on the daily tasks people performed, in subjects such as farming, sewing, carpentry, home building, child rearing, home remedies, food processing, and animal husbandry, to name a few. Research into writing about subjects like those just listed will illustrate the diverse nature of topics addressed in technical writing, including, as Durack suggests, technical writing by women. And research of a more varied sample of technical documents will provide additional and more significant insights into the characteristics of technical writing from the nineteenth century—indeed, in any century.

How Do We Establish an Historical Context?

To understand the historical context of the books in this study, I consulted the previously mentioned sources on the history of housekeeping (Cowan, Green, and Strasser) to learn about the daily lives of women in the nineteenth century. Additionally, I found useful information in scholarship from history of the book, a relatively new discipline which examines all aspects of publishing, including writers, readers, printers, publishers, and the network of relationships between them. Books particularly useful were: Susan Coultrap-McQuin's *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*, about women's participation in the literary marketplace from the

1840s to the early 1900s, and two books by Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, a study of American women's reading, and *Reading in America*, a collection of essays examining how books function in society. Additionally, I used several sources to compile biographical information on the authors: *American Women in Science: A Biographical Dictionary*, *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, and *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*.

There is little easily available scholarship on housekeeping manuals from a technical writing perspective. Finding specific publishing information is another academic pursuit in itself; for instance, simply trying to determine the exact number of editions and printings for each of the books challenged more than a few competent librarians. While history of the book scholarship encompasses this type of research, it is a relatively new field and has only begun to locate and chronicle the abundance of information to be found in publishers' archives. For now, I have relied on the Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (OCLC) to search the WorldCat database to find the different editions and printings of each of the three books; in each case, I can safely say that there are *at least* a particular number of editions or printings without assuming the highest number listed is necessarily the last. Also, to get some sense of the number of books in a typical printing, I found useful information from Davidson's *Revolution and the Word*. Researching several sources, Davidson estimates that in 1825, a press run of ten thousand copies for a novel was not unusual; in 1830, paperback novels distributed through the postal system were

typically printed in editions of thirty thousand copies (17). Although these figures are for novels, they provide some reference when looking at the number of printings for each of the books being studied.

How Do We Recover Elusive Historical Readers?

While we can discover much about any given time period by reading biographies of specific authors or technological histories describing printing or publishing practices, the historical reader is always elusive. It is difficult, even foolhardy, to make assumptions about “typical” readers. Addressing the difficulty of recovering historical readers, Robert Darton comments, “the inner experience of ordinary readers may always elude us” (45). To discover clues of historical readers, Davidson suggests reading a text’s introductory material: “Prefatory material or any other such reading clues also serve as *reader* clues and indicate something of the gender, age, class, and level of literacy of the first audience to whom the book was addressed” (*Revolution* 6). Similarly, she offers other ways to recover historic readers, such as examining inscriptions, marginalia, and the book’s appearance (for wear, ear-marked pages, etc.); analyzing the text itself for the writer’s perceived audience; and researching diaries, letters, and publishing records for mention of the book. However, when reading a text for signs of its audience, we should remember that these “readers” have been constructed by the writer; they represent the writer’s ideal readers and therefore may not realistically represent all the texts’ readers. Since my study was limited to examining the books on microfiche, I was unable to physically assess the books so am limited to searching the text for reader clues.

Recovering historical female readers proves especially challenging because of social restraints that essentially “erased” historical accounts of women by failing to record aspects of their lives. To illustrate, Davidson discusses publishers who kept records of transactions with men, even when these men were married to famous women writers who were known to deal directly with the publishers: “In short, the sociology of wage earning and spending is important here since in a social and economic context that privileged male buying and reading, *any* evidence of a female readership becomes a significant literary and sociological phenomenon” (*Revolution* 8). Therefore, Davidson calls for a preliminary reading of the woman reader before examining *what* she read:

The first step in that preliminary reading is to reconstruct the conditions under which she read. We cannot simply reconstruct her, for she is no more a monolith than is “the female reader” today. However, her society tended to define her monolithically, as societies tend to define most members of low-prestige groups. Although the educated women may well have enjoyed a more privileged life than her serving sister, by law vast differences in wealth, educational level, capability, class, or race were outweighed by one common feature. Both were “women,” a social construct as much as a biological entity. (*Revolution* 112)

So it is necessary to “read” the women of nineteenth-century America to understand the context in which they were readers and writers. And to read these women, it is helpful to understand how prevailing attitudes affected them.

To understand the ideology of a given time period, scholars frequently turn to nonfiction writing, such as advice literature. For instance, in her search for the historical housewife, Matthews read “potboilers, best-selling cookbooks, popular magazines, and advice books. In general, I asked myself where the images of home and of housewife would be most reliably reflected” (xvi). Similarly, Green notes, “The advice literature in nineteenth-century America has been an important resource for this book. It is massive and, like the meticulously articulated diary, seductive. . . .[it] also helps reveal the larger cultural concerns of an era” (5). He goes on to warn, however, against assuming the prescribed advice realistically reflects readers’ behavior, because authors have individual agendas, often presenting conflicting advice or promoting idealistic situations. Likewise, Strasser comments on the benefits and limitations of reading advice literature to construct historical context:

I continually returned to the literature of advice, those cookbooks, women’s magazines, and manuals for running households that so plagued me at the start. They addressed a limited audience during the nineteenth century, since books and even magazines cost a great deal of money, but women exchanged magazines, saved reference books for years, and passed on their information and advice about housework to friends and daughters. *Advice literature suggests ways of doing housework, gives information about equipment, and counsels women on how they should think about their work* [my italics]. Its shortcomings for the researcher stem not only

from class but from the fact that these books and magazines tell what the writers prescribed, not what most women actually did. (xv)

Notice how Strasser's description of advice literature recalls descriptions of technical writing. Finally, yet another writer, Tonkovich, explains her focus on nonfiction/advice texts "because of their announced intent to be direct, objective, partisan, scientific, and/or prescriptive." (Again, note the correlation to technical writing.) She also observes their revelation of ideology, commenting on their authors, "They presented themselves as the representatives of community opinion . . ." (xv). Later, she comments "handbooks were deemed to represent socially established practice" (136). These examples show that even considering the limitations, reading advice literature such as housekeeping manuals can illuminate the cultural context of a particular era.

Understanding Nineteenth-Century Ideology: The Cult of Domesticity

Victorian attitudes strongly influenced ideas about women: who they were, how they should behave, what they could—and should—do. Attitudes toward women varied during the nineteenth century, ranging from a widespread conservative view of "the weaker sex," to a less common liberal view focusing on women's strengths that gained popularity toward the end of the century. Basically, the conservative view portrayed women as naturally emotional, submissive, and not given to intellectual pursuits. Those supporting this view, the "Cult of Domesticity," also believed that women were morally pure and therefore well-qualified for moral and religious instruction in their families (see

Matthews and Coultrap-McQuin for in-depth discussions of this ideology). In this scenario, women were ultimately more suited to domestic work. Conversely, proponents of women's rights sanctioned a less common view that women were as intelligent as men, and their emotional nature—their ability to nurture and care—was a strength. Some, in fact, argued that this made women superior to men. Coultrap-McQuin extensively discusses these two camps and the idea of separate spheres between women and men:

The conservatives believed that women were assigned by God and nature to their separate sphere of activity and should rejoice in that. The liberals felt that the restrictions on women's sphere, imposed only by social circumstances, should be eliminated, while the values of the sphere—nurturance, love, and morality—should be spread throughout society. (9-10)

These attitudes coincided with the increasing sentimentalization of the home beginning in the 1830s; scholars such as Matthews expound on the nature of this trend. By 1850, the home was overwhelmingly portrayed as the center of American culture.

The prevailing ideal of "True Womanhood" in nineteenth-century America affected all women, who were held (and held themselves accountable) to these standards, even when they did not always possess those prescribed qualities themselves. Coultrap-McQuin notes the influence of nineteenth-century ideology on women:

In other words, while there is ample evidence that women themselves did not wholly conform to prescriptions of True Womanhood, nevertheless, those prescriptions exerted a strong influence on what was seen,

understood, and said about women's lives. True Womanhood was the ideal against which most women's activities, including their literary ones, were judged. (11)

The Victorian ideal of separate spheres also influenced women's roles in nineteenth-century America. The belief in separate spheres resulted largely from industrialization, which increased segregation by sex as men joined the workforce to generate income while women stayed home to tend to their families. Men's domain became the "outside world;" women's became the home.

A major focus of Coultrap-McQuin's book is on the conditions that allowed women to be professional writers, despite Victorian ideals restricting women to their spheres. Among other things, she argues that women had a unique perspective from the vantage point of their separate sphere: they qualified as experts about matters within the feminine realm. She notes, "Most women writers shared the moral standards of the nineteenth-century middle class and were encouraged by their society to be the moral guardians of their families and communities" (46). Additionally, she discusses other conditions that fostered women writers, namely, that relationships between writers and Gentlemen Publishers emulated prescribed female-male roles of the era. Also, the idea that writing was traditionally cultural and non-commercial made it acceptable for women, as moral guardians, to become writers. And as the century progressed, women writers achieved enormous success. Coultrap-McQuin remarks, "In the 1850's, nearly 50 percent of the best-selling titles were by women, any one work selling more than writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman

combined. . . . By 1872, nearly three-quarters of American novels were written by women" (47).

Still, women writers were not typical. In some ways, they were much like the women they wrote for: white, middle-class women who worked at home; being writers did not completely exempt them from their roles as housekeepers. For instance, Matthews notes of Lydia Maria Child, "her letters reflect the strain of carrying the 'double burden' of heavy domestic responsibilities and writing—writing not as an avocation but in order to support herself and her husband" (23). Also, women writers earned wages working *in* their homes, unlike the typical but few women wage-earners during that time. To clarify, in 1860, only around fifteen percent of all women earned wages outside the home, and these were typically widows or minority women (Coultrap-McQuin 24). In her book, Tonkovich examines the lives of four professional women writers of the nineteenth century, including Catherine Beecher, who paradoxically prescribed domesticity for other women while not conforming to their own indoctrination. Tonkovich comments on the four writers: "As adults, none of these women wrote and kept a traditional domestic establishment concurrently" (xv).

Also, we should consider that the concept of separate spheres was often just that: an ideological construct of nineteenth-century discourse. Tonkovich cautions against a reductive model of separate spheres, mentioning current scholarship that considers the notion of separate spheres a trope. Instead, she demonstrates how women's lives, especially those of the women writers she studies, often encroached the boundaries of their feminine sphere.

The important point is that gender roles were widely prescribed for women in the nineteenth century, illustrated in the ideology of separate spheres present in the writing. Whether this notion realistically reflected every woman's life is not the issue here. Rather, it is important to acknowledge the presence of ideology in the writing and its influence on all women, both readers and writers. In short, these brief summaries of the notions of separate spheres and the cult of domesticity help us understand the context of nineteenth-century writing. Similarly, we will briefly look at the publishing context of the time to see how this, too, influenced women readers and writers.

Publishing in the Nineteenth Century

In order to provide an overview of the history of housekeeping books, I rely on information from Matthews' *Just a Housewife*. By the end of the eighteenth century, American cuisine differed significantly from English cooking by incorporating indigenous ingredients. As an example, scholars regard Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery* (1796) one of the first American cookbooks. The need for recipes reflecting this new cuisine created a market for American cookbooks. Also, throughout the nineteenth century but particularly in the second quarter, new household items and utensils were increasingly available, creating a need for "how-to" literature. Matthews notes, "Not surprisingly, given the technological changes, the economic growth and the increasing urbanization, there was a proliferation of cookbooks in this period" (13).

And there were increasing numbers of readers for housekeeping manuals. To illustrate, in *A History of Book Publishing in the United States (1630-1865)*, John Tebbel

notes, “America’s drive toward universal literacy . . . produced in the 1840s the largest reading audience anyone had ever seen” (207). Rising levels of literacy for women certainly affected publishing practices. For example, by 1850, at least fifty percent of white women could read and write, with literacy notably prevalent in New England (Coultrap-McQuin 22). Matthews explains the effects of increasingly literate readers: “The growing number of educated, urban women created a market for advice books and novels—as well as for cookbooks—and both of these genres then reflected the new possibilities for female self-esteem available by the antebellum period” (21).

Additionally, innovations in print technology impacted the publication of housekeeping books. Coultrap-McQuin provides an overview of the burgeoning publishing industry in nineteenth-century America:

Between 1820 and 1850 the publishing industry expanded tenfold in response to increasing national levels of literacy, people’s growing interest in reading as cheap entertainment, and an expanding railroad system making national distribution of books possible. . . . Changes in printing technology, more radical than any since the fifteenth century—including the advent of the steam-powered cylinder press, the use of stereotyped plates, and cheaper methods of making paper and bindings—made possible the publication of low-priced cloth and cheap paper editions of books. (30)

Davidson, too, mentions the impact of the same technological advances which “allowed the American publisher of the second quarter of the nineteenth century to print faster and cheaper than at any time previously in Western history and to produce thereby books that

were genuinely affordable by the masses” (*Revolution* 24). The invention of mechanized printing, she claims, was “a technological advance in some ways as impressive and far-reaching as the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century” (*Revolution* 4).

Not surprisingly, publication was influenced by readers’ demands: publishers printed larger runs and solicited revised editions for books that sold well. Strasser notes, “The manuals that offered the most information sold best, had the most influence” (xv). In summary, it is important to consider the relationships between readers, writers, publishers, and print technology when contemplating historical readers, because these, too, help us understand the context of historical texts.

Comparing Three Housekeeping Manuals: 1829-1881

As historical examples of technical writing, housekeeping books from the nineteenth century served as manuals for workers in the home: they existed to help homemakers perform tasks around the house, including cleaning and cooking. As technical manuals, they differ in content and appearance from other texts, such as novels, produced during the same time. Like other technical manuals, housekeeping books incorporate elements typical of technical writing, such as style, format, and organizational and motivational strategies, to instruct readers to perform household tasks. Examining these books allows us to consider writers' assumptions about their audience and to see how these writers' purposes, based on their perceived audience, affect the rhetoric and design of their writing.

Additionally, these books exemplify technical writing in their purpose of conveying technical subject matter to their readers. Analyzing historical manuals offers us insights into the available technologies of a given time period. By examining housekeeping manuals, we can gauge what types of technology were available and also which types were actually used, as when Helen Campbell notes in *The Easiest Way*, "With full faith that the fuel of the future will be gas, its use is as yet, for many reasons, very limited; the cost of

gas in our smaller cities and towns preventing adoption by any but the wealthy, who are really in less need of it" (45). Additionally, examining housekeeping manuals produced during different parts of the nineteenth century reveals not only changes in household technology but also in the ideology toward housekeeping and housekeepers. Specifically, the earlier books exemplify the ideology of the cult of domesticity, while Campbell's represents the movement toward the ideology of scientific management. But even more significantly, all three books reveal the writers' imperative to educate women. This imperative, too, reveals how ideology affects the writing, particularly in the writer's purpose, style, and subject matter. This educational purpose is apparent when we examine the way the writers convey prevailing technologies: their aim is to motivate and educate readers to use household implements. So the commitment to women's education reveals the writers' individual ideologies.

Examining these books allows us to analyze writers' assumptions about their audience and how these writers' purposes, based on their perceived audience, affect the rhetoric and design of their writing. With this in mind, I have selected three books on housekeeping, Child's *The American Frugal Housewife* (1829), Beecher and Beecher Stowe's *The American Woman's Home* (1869), and Campbell's *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking* (1881). Comparing these three books reveals both similarities and differences, particularly when each is examined for its effectiveness as a technical document.

Analyzing *The American Frugal Housewife*

Lydia Maria Child's *The American Frugal Housewife* is one of the earlier American housekeeping books, first published in 1829 and undergoing 33 editions. Child (1802-1880) was a well-established professional writer by the time *Frugal* was published; she had written many short stories and novels and had founded and edited the country's first children's magazine, *Juvenile Miscellany*. In 1833, she was celebrated as "the nation's foremost woman writer" by the *North American Review* and was the second woman ever allowed library privileges at the Boston Athenaeum. However, within a year, her popularity declined in light of her increasingly political activities, namely her outspoken position as an abolitionist. Subscriptions to her magazine dropped, forcing her to stop its publication, and her privileges at the Athenaeum were revoked. In 1859, she unsuccessfully sought permission to nurse the imprisoned abolitionist John Brown. Undeterred, she continued to lend her support to the causes of slaves, women, and Native Americans. She wrote throughout the rest of her life, publishing not only political works but children's books as well.

Much has been made of the financial necessity that fueled Child's writing career. Her marriage to David Child, who was arrested for debt in 1835, was plagued with financial troubles. Her writing primarily supported the couple in an age when few women were gainfully employed. *The American Frugal Housewife*, then, with its emphasis on economy, was unmistakably written from an informed perspective.

Child's Format and Organization

At 130 pages, *The American Frugal Housewife* is the smallest of the three books under study. The frontispiece portrays different animals diagrammed for butchering. Opposite this page is the title page, which includes a dedication "To Those Who Are Not Ashamed of Economy." The book does not contain a table of contents but begins with an introductory chapter, in which Child defines the economy of housekeeping as "the art of gathering up all the fragments, so that nothing be lost. I mean fragments of *time*, as well as *materials*" (3). She immediately offers advice on ways to economize around the home: "Cheap as stockings are, it is good economy to knit them" and "Where turkeys and geese are kept, handsome feather fans may as well be made by the younger members of a family, as to be bought" (3). In fact, the rest of the book follows this same format. Child writes in prose form, advising housewives on ways to save time and money in their homes. The book's appearance is text-heavy, containing long paragraphs laden with advice, such as this one:

As far as it is possible, have bits of bread eaten up before they become hard. Spread those that are not eaten, and let them dry, to be pounded for puddings, or soaked for brewis. Brewis is made of crusts and dry pieces of bread, soaked for a good while in hot milk, mashed up, salted, and buttered like toast. Above all, do not let crusts accumulate in such quantities that they cannot be used. With proper care, there is no need of losing a particle of bread, even in the hottest weather. (8)

Much of Child's advice on household economy, which appears in the chapter, *Odd Scraps for the Economical*, seems to follow an organizational pattern based on dictating oral advice as opposed to being organized in some meaningful way. For instance, in a text-heavy passage on page twelve, Child discusses a different topic in each paragraph, moving from cleaning marble fireplaces, preserving feathers, washing hair with brandy and rum, to brushing teeth. The text-heavy prose would seem to imply readers would read this book comprehensively; however, knowing that the readers were predominantly women whose days were filled with household tasks would suggest they would instead use this book for reference. This chapter's organization could benefit from formatting devices such as subheadings or marginal notes so readers could quickly access the specific information included in this chapter.

The book itself is divided into two main sections, *The Frugal Housewife* and *Hints to Persons of Moderate Fortune*. These section headings are placed at the top of each page, to give readers some reference to their location in the book. Likewise, pagination appears in the upper outer corners of each page. The book appears to have ten chapters although it is difficult to be sure for a number of reasons, the first being the lack of a table of contents. Also, chapters do not always begin on a separate page. In an effort seemingly designed to practice economy, white space has been used sparingly; chapters frequently begin on the same page as the preceding chapter. The new chapter is indicated by a heading, centered and in all uppercase type larger than the general text's type size. If the chapter does not start at the top of the page, a rule and surrounding white space separate the preceding text from the chapter heading. Another indication for chapters might be the

arabic numbers that appear at the bottom of random pages throughout the book. They seem to correlate to the number of the chapter and generally appear on a page within the chapter (as opposed to appearing on the first page of a chapter). These numbers may, in fact, provide better evidence of what material belongs within a particular chapter than the headings themselves, because while chapter headings are generally consistent in appearance, several major headings share the same heading style as chapter headings, and this creates some confusion. For example, the headings *Vegetables*, *Herbs*, and *Cheap Dye-Stuffs* look like chapter headings, but both *Vegetables* and *Cheap Dye-Stuffs* contain the number four at the bottom of pages within each of these sections, indicating that both these headings belong within chapter four. The *Herbs* section begins with a heading identical to the others; since it is between the other two headings, we must conclude that all three sections make up the fourth chapter.

The bulk of the book contains recipes, and these chapters show a categorical organization, allowing ease of accessibility. For example, the chapter on *Simple Remedies* includes recipes set off with white space and introduced with subordinate headings which appear centered and in all uppercase type, though smaller than the chapter heading's typesize. Most recipes in the book follow suit; however, these recipes do not follow the format familiar to us today, where directions are listed in steps and amounts are specific. The directions are instead written as imperative sentences within one paragraph: "Boil new milk; stir flour into some cold milk in a bowl, and pour it into the kettle while the milk is boiling: let it all boil six or eight minutes" (33). Note, too, Child's assumption that her readers will be familiar with the terms she uses.

Also in terms of format, the book does include an appendix and index. The index is fairly comprehensive, appearing as an alphabetized table. The index also includes a separate index for the appendix. The appendix could be seen as compensating for the lack of organization for previous sections of the book. It contains entries, once again presented in random order, set off as individual paragraphs surrounded with white space. The subject heading appears in all uppercase. The diverse entries include remedies (treating burns), brief recipes (clarifying sugar), and cleaning recommendations (removing grease spots). Items marked with an asterisk have appeared in other parts of the book. On the whole, the formatting used in the appendix provides better accessibility for directions and recipes readers would want to refer to quickly.

Overall, it is difficult to presume why minimal formatting was used. One idea, which applies to the other books discussed later, is that these books were published at the height of the era of the Victorian novel; readers were accustomed to reading long passages of text. This book, then, may have seemed appropriately organized to the author or publishers given readers' literacy at the time. Also, this book was published at the beginning of the time period in the nineteenth century that witnessed so many advances in print technology; those innovations, which surely affected a book's formatting, may not have been available for the book's first printing.

Additionally, Child may have wanted to maintain an economical appearance. Too much white space might have seemed wasteful. In the introductory chapter to *The American Frugal Housewife*, Child writes "The author has no apology to offer for this cheap little book of economical hints, except her deep conviction that such a book is

needed. In this case, renown is out of the question, and ridicule is a matter of indifference”

(6). In fact, Child’s commitment to frugality stemmed from her own impoverished living, as Matthews writes:

Students of Child’s life have pointed out that Child’s marriage to a man who tended to be improvident meant that she had less domestic help than was usual for a middle-class woman. What is more, she and David Child spent several years living apart, evidently for financial reasons. Therefore her close study of the best way to achieve frugality, reflected in her popular advice book of 1929, was no affectation. (23)

Child’s commitment to economy is illustrated moreover when examining her tone and writing style, as discussed in the next section.

Child’s Style and Presentation of Ideology

Child’s style in *The American Frugal Housewife* is utilitarian. Her sentences are spare; the tone is pragmatic: “Provided brothers and sisters go together, and are not allowed to go with bad children, it is a great deal better for the boys and girls on a farm to be picking blackberries at six cents a quart, than to be wearing out their clothes on useless play” (4). She uses imperative sentences for most directions: “Preserve the backs of old letters to write on” (15). Her sentences are clear, typically containing only one idea. She delivers her instructions matter-of-factly, assuming correctly that her readers are women, indicated by her assumptions that women perform the cooking and cleaning in their

homes. Additionally, Child's matter-of-fact tone complements her overriding philosophy, stated in many instances throughout the book as it appears here in a typical example:

No false pride, or foolish ambition to appear as well as others, should ever induce a person to live one cent beyond the income of which he is certain. If you have two dollars a day, let nothing but sickness induce you to spend more than nine shillings; if you have one dollar a day, do not spend but seventy-five cents; if you have half a dollar a day, be satisfied to spend forty cents. (4)

Especially in the last section of the book, *Hints to Persons of Moderate Fortunes*, she expounds on her belief that most people create problems in their lives because they live beyond their means: "The prevailing evil of the day is extravagance" (89). In this section, the style changes from the curt, imperative tone of the directions in the preceding chapters. Here, Child delivers anecdotes as parables for her message of economy, such as this example, which begins: "I called upon a farmer's daughter, who had lately married a young physician of moderate talents, and destitute of fortune" (90). She goes on to tell how the bride squandered her dowry on extravagances for the home, neglecting the useful items they would need. Then the wife had to borrow money from her husband to purchase the items, causing "much domestic disquiet." In these conversational stories, Child provides examples of how living extravagantly ruins lives while living economically and accepting one's position can lead to happiness. The stories function as parables in that they are designed to teach; because of their simple nature, the endings often seem trite.

As in the first section of the book, Child does not object to writing in first person. This is effective in the last section, which reads as a series of essays. And it is here that Child expounds on her views of women's roles in society. Considering the fact that she was a popular writer offers insight into the predominant ideology of housekeeping during the early nineteenth century. Child supports education for girls, but education of a different sort. She cites "mismanagement in education," namely educating girls in academics, as the chief cause of domestic strife and unhappiness in women:

Education does not usually point the female heart to its only true resting-place. That dear English word "*home*," is not half so powerful a talisman as "*the world*." Instead of the salutary truth, that happiness is *in* duty, they are taught to consider the two things totally distinct; and that whoever seeks one, must sacrifice the other. (96)

Child proposes educating girls in domestic matters, through apprenticeships, to prepare them to manage their own homes: "Young ladies should be taught that usefulness is happiness, and that all other things are but incidental. With regard to matrimonial speculations, they should be taught nothing!" (92). In fact, she argues that women spend too much time focusing their sights on a suitable husband, including learning genteel pursuits, rather than learning the importance of domestic work. "Making the education of girls such a series of 'man-traps' makes the whole system unhealthy, by poisoning the motive" (93-4). This position on educating girls suggests early feminist stirrings, but overall, Child sees women's place as in the home, endorsing the popular belief in separate spheres for women, describing domestic life "the gathering place of the deepest and purest

affections; as the sphere of woman's *enjoyments* as well as her *duties*; as, indeed, the whole world to her" (95).

Reading the later chapters, we get a sense of prevailing attitudes, including those Child criticizes. Clearly, women have few if any opportunities for employment beyond the home, and she advocates the dominant ideology of women staying within their domestic sphere. Yet reading the household hints, we get a sense of the daily life for housekeepers and their never-ending array of responsibilities. In this way, reading Child's book affords insights into prevailing ideologies about women and domesticity in the early 1900s.

Child's Writing about Technology

Likewise, the book reveals a glimpse of technology available during the early nineteenth century. That a major portion of the book is devoted to recipes corroborates the fact that cooking was the primary daily chore for women. The recipes could be adapted to cooking in a fireplace or on the new cast-iron cooking stoves being patented in the 1830s. The cast-iron stove, one of the major technological innovations of the nineteenth century, reduced the dangers and difficulties—namely, heat and cinders—associated with cooking over an open fire. Heat was easier to regulate in stoves, which required less fuel than fireplaces. Still, as Strasser points out, even with stoves, women still had to haul fuel and tend fires, which required considerable time and effort (49).

Looking at the general advice throughout the book, we can discover much about daily life in the early nineteenth century: people used lanterns for indoor light (16), fireplaces for heating (11-12), corn husks or straw for mattresses (16), pumps on wells for

drawing water (16), and cellars for storing perishable items like butter and eggs (15). Candles and soap were still being made at home, although these practices were in decline, (10, 22). Similarly, people were not always slaughtering their own livestock, but instead buying meat from a butcher (43). These examples serve as clues about readers' lives and available technology. But more importantly, they reveal Child's motivational and educational purpose, especially her intent to inform women on matters pertinent to their housework. The instructional aim of *The American Frugal Housewife* distinguishes it as technical writing.

Analyzing *The American Woman's Home*

The American Woman's Home, by sisters Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, is a representative manual from mid-nineteenth century, the Golden Age of Domesticity, so-called because of the elevated status of the home and the reigning doctrine of the cult of domesticity. During the mid-nineteenth century, the very idea of home was elevated, cast in a role that, according to historian Matthews was "an epic one in which the home provided a touchstone of values for reforming the entire society" (35). The book expanded on Beecher's 1841 *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* and was later revised as *The New Housekeeper's Manual* in 1873. Tonkovich speculates that Beecher seized an opportunity to cash in on yet another edition of the book, "Drawing both on her reputation as an educator and domestic theorist and her sister Harriet's increased notoriety as a best-selling author, Beecher reissued the *Treatise* as *The American Woman's Home*" (182). The book was originally published by J.B. Ford and Company, whose first

published author was minister Henry Ward Beecher, Catherine's brother. The book was commissioned as a subscription book, which is a book that has had a market created, through subscriptions, either before or after publication. Books were published this way if a publisher feared his investment would not be re-couped by over the counter sales. In this case, the investment paid off: J.B. Ford sold 50,000 copies of the book (Tebbel 528). That it went through at least eight different printings, with a run as recently as 1996, gives some indication of its popularity.

Catherine Beecher (1800-1878), famous as an educator and abolitionist, was a well-established professional writer by the time *The American Woman's Home* was published in 1869. In her lifetime, she published over thirty books. She made significant contributions to women's education in both her numerous articles and books, and in the schools she established, the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823 and the Western Female Institute, founded with sister Harriet in 1832. She saw women's values as the moral foundation for American culture, and her educational philosophy sought to elevate both mind and soul.

Many of the reference books consulted for this work refer to Beecher solely as author when discussing *The American Woman's Home*. Matthews provides a rationale for this, stating that *American Woman's* was a revision of the 1841 volume of *Treatise on Domestic Economy* that listed Harriet Beecher Stowe as co-author; presumably, Stowe's name was left on the 1869 book, even though it was revised by her sister (110). For the purpose of facilitating discussion, I will use the name Beecher rather than refer to both authors, since the writing is generally attributed to Catherine.

Beecher's Format and Organization

With 500 pages packed full of advice, *The American Woman's Home* is a household manual aimed at women. Reading it offers insights into the daily lives of homemakers at mid-century. It begins with a frontispiece portraying a family sitting together at a table, captured in a glow of light, followed by a dedication to the Women of America, "in whose hands rest the real destinies of the republic, as moulded [sic] by the early training and preserved amid the maturer influences of home." A lengthy table of contents follows, complete with topic overviews and inclusive page numbers for all thirty-eight chapters. These chapter listings are set off with white space and hanging indentation. The chapter titles appear in all uppercase, with a roman numeral designation as well. The book also contains a glossary with alphabetical listings emphasized with italics, and an index, also alphabetical. The index entries include sub-listings that appear in a paragraph form, in the same manner as chapter sub-topics are arranged in the table of contents. Both areas are similarly arranged, but the paragraph arrangement is less decipherable than a list would be. Pagination (arabic) appears in upper outer corners. The book's title appears at the top of the left page, the appropriate chapter title at the top of the right, which improves accessibility and orientation within the book. Unlike Child's book, chapters begin on an individual page, although this is not restricted to right-side pages only. Chapter titles are in a typesize larger than the text's, in all uppercase, centered, with a corresponding roman numeral centered above.

The chapters appear as text-heavy as Child's, but *The American Woman's Home* contains illustrations, ranging from the decorative, such as the drawing of a house

accompanying the title page to the chapter *A Christian House*, to representations of capillaries and arteries in a chapter on health (45). Illustrations other than decorative ones are indicated as numbered figures, referred to in nearby text. These illustrations are useful in teaching readers unfamiliar theory, as in the figure of the artery, or to help readers visualize concepts, such as the illustration of a window dressing (89).

The content and organization of the text-heavy chapters suggest an assumption that readers will read the book entirely through. In fact, much of the content is educational and would benefit from sustained reading. Each chapter, however, stands alone. And formatting provides ease of access for quick referencing that busy homemakers no doubt relied on. As mentioned earlier, formatting elements such as the table of contents, index, and chapter titles at the top of right-side pages aid in accessibility. But within chapters, other formatting tactics also help: italics indicate subtopics, as in the chapter on propagation techniques (385), and numbers indicate the sequence of steps in a procedure, such as washing dishes (372). Elsewhere, a table readily conveys information for adding up the cost of a decorating project (90). In short, the use of formatting and organization that support learning are characteristic of this writing; they are also characteristic of technical writing.

Beecher's Style and Presentation of Ideology

The style of *The American Woman's Home* affirms its place as a household manual/manifesto written during the Golden Age of domesticity. Unlike the matter-of-fact tone of Child's *The American Frugal Housewife*, the tone here is an enthusiastic, and at

times, admonishing, call to duty for American women. Beecher is sympathetic to the plight of housekeepers ("It is probable that there is no class of persons in the world who have such incessant trials of temper, and temptations to be fretful, as American housekeepers" 213) so much that she includes a chapter, *Good Temper in the Housekeeper*, where she reasons that women can maintain positive attitudes by, essentially, preparing for the worst, expecting their work to be difficult and unappreciated.

Additionally, to further ingratiate herself with her readers, Beecher identifies herself as a peer, a homemaker. In the introduction, she lists her credentials, including years spent at home as the eldest of a family of thirteen siblings. She also lists her establishment of the Hartford Female Seminary and her writing credits as a way to corroborate her expertise in the subject matter. And yet, Tonkovich maintains that Beecher differed from the women she wrote for, describing her as "an unmarried, childless, and virtually homeless forty-one-year old woman writing a book on domestic practice" (91).

Additionally, Beecher establishes credibility by assuring her readers that the book contains the most current information available, "embodying the latest results of science" (15). Throughout the book, Beecher strives to maintain credibility, marshaling in scientific experts where appropriate. For example, in her discussion of the necessity of fresh air for good health, she quotes two physicians, including "a distinguished French physician, M. Baudeloque" (53). Similarly, in a later discussion, she cites several doctors, including one Dr. Burne, who appeared "before the London Medical Society" (336). The identification

with readers, the expert opinions to verify accuracy, are all part of an apparent effort to establish ethos.

Clearly, Beecher had lofty expectations for her readers. She was committed to the belief in women's capability to effect change through their influence upon their families:

An American mother and housekeeper who rightly estimates the long train of influence which will pass down to thousands, whose destinies, from generation to generation, will be modified by those decisions of her will which regulate the temper, principles, and habits of her family, must be elevated above petty temptations which would otherwise assail her. (214)

The status of homemakers, then, needed to be elevated; the climate was favorable at mid-century, when the cult of domesticity, with its ideology of separate spheres, reigned supreme. While the ideology of separate spheres limited women to the home, it also gave women their own domain in which to excel. And *The American Woman's Home*, covering everything from anatomy to politics, could teach women everything they needed to know, according to Beecher, to prepare for the work ahead. Like Child, Beecher takes issue with girls' education, finding academic subjects, lacking in domestic application, largely unsuitable to prepare girls to become housekeepers, "women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades" (1). Instead, Beecher seeks to educate her readers in an extensive array of subjects, not limited to cleaning and cooking, to provide basic theory and application for diverse topics such as health, digestion, altruism, economy, plant propagation, animal husbandry, heating and ventilation, and waste management. For example, the chapter on *Domestic Exercise* begins with explanations of

the muscular system and cellular respiration before launching into a discussion of the benefits of exercise. Here, Beecher explains prevailing theories of how habitual mental activity without exercise wears the body; she uses this argument to further her position against purely academic pursuits for girls, proposing instead that domestic work, with its combination of mental and physical activity, provides just the right balance for the female constitution.

As much practical information as the book contains, it also has a large amount of theoretical information, including tracts where Beecher expounds upon women's duties. Chapters such as *The Christian Family*; *Giving in Charity*; *Domestic Amusements and Social Duties*; and *Care of the Homeless, the Helpless, and the Vicious* prescribe moral, rather than mundane, duties for American women. In a typical example, Beecher writes, "the great end for which the family was instituted is the training to virtue and happiness of our whole race, as the children of our Heavenly Father" (433). And in an age of separate spheres, where men worked outside, and increasingly, away from the home, women were relegated the duty of child-rearing, including moral instruction. If women would promote harmony and moral values in their homes, their husbands and children could similarly carry these values into society at large. Beecher's writing, then, is something of a manifesto for the cult of domesticity, which promoted, among other things, the idea that women had the power to affect the world outside their homes because of their influence over their families.

The sheer amount of information Beecher covers necessitates the various modes used throughout the book. While the tone is generally conversational, it modulates from

the academic, as in the chapter on domestic exercise where she explains the neuro-muscular system (114-5); to the referential, in the chapter on accidents with directions for preparing antidotes (350); as well as a combination of both modes, seen in the chapter on plant propagation which has educational material along with how-to information on grafting procedures (384-5). Topics seem organized with thought given to what background information readers could need, starting with general material, as in the chapter *Healthful Food*, which begins with an explanation of digestion, leading to the more specific, a discussion on the properties of different types of foods. Perhaps in awareness of the broad educational range of the readers, Beecher seems uninclined to assume readers will know basic scientific facts but instead provides a thorough foundation, in layperson's language. Her discussions of bodily functions seem particularly detailed, but she defends her scope accordingly:

There is no really efficacious mode of preparing a woman to take a rational care of the health of a family, except by communicating that knowledge in regard to the construction of the body and the laws of health which is the basis of the medical profession. Not that a woman should undertake the minute and extensive investigation requisite for a physician; but she should gain a general knowledge of first principles. (104)

She also employs analogies and metaphors from women's life experiences to clarify unfamiliar concepts. For example, she explains the heating principle of reflection as "just as a ball rebounds from a wall; just as sound is thrown back from a hill, making echo" (68). To define a cell, she compares it to "the egg of any bird or fowl" (105). Once

again, these strategies illustrate Beecher's commitment to educating her readers, which requires thoughtful consideration of their needs. Furthermore, analyzing these strategies reveals the presence of Beecher's personal agenda, the education of women.

Beecher frequently resorts to different rhetorical tactics to motivate her readers. Her advice is grounded in Christian principles, which she expounds on throughout the book. Like Child, she clearly advocates the Protestant work ethic: "As the only legitimate object of amusement is to prepare mind and body for the proper discharge of duty, the protracting of such as interfere with regular employments, or induce excessive fatigue, or weary mind, or invade the proper hours for repose, must be sinful" (287). In fact, a major theme is that women should find contentment in their domestic duties because they have been prescribed by God. Protestant bias is apparent, particularly in this passage where Beecher discusses the deterioration of the home life, which she attributes to, among other things, the influx of foreign immigrants: "We abound in domestic helpers from foreign shores, but they are to a large extent thriftless, ignorant, and unscrupulous" (466). Later, after similarly criticizing the decline in birthrates, attributed to women's deteriorating health caused by factory work, she comments that foreigners, who gravitated toward domestic work, are rearing large families: "Thus it is that the controlling political majority of New England is passing from the educated to the children of ignorant foreigners" (467).

The tone in the religious considerations and elsewhere is often emotionally charged, as in the section where Beecher argues against women wearing corsets, "the evil becoming so common" that "tender parents are unconsciously leading their lovely and hapless daughters to this awful doom" (162-3). Advice on discouraging masturbation

employs similar language: "certain parts of the body are not to be touched except for purposes of cleanliness, and that the most dreadful suffering comes from disobeying these commands" (286). If we consider gender stereotypes of the time, that women were seen as highly emotional, irrational, with strong ties to morality and religion, we can see how this writing style would be seen as appropriate, even motivating, for women.

Beecher's Writing about Technology

Close reading of *The American Woman's Home* reveals technologies available to homemakers during the mid-nineteenth century. Additionally, we can find references to technologies in decline as well as those on the rise. For instance, rather than relying solely on fireplaces for warmth, people were also using stoves. Although Beecher includes plans for an ideal home with a type of central heating, produced by connecting stoves and a kitchen range together, this was apparently not commonly practiced by the typical middle-class reader. As Strasser notes, "This plan was utopian, not a description of her readers' homes, still warmed by fireplaces and free-standing heating stoves, for which she provided directions for safe and economical use" (54). Likewise, the practices of candle-making and soap-making were falling out of practice: "comparatively few take the toil upon them" (334). Even Child's book, written forty years earlier, comments on the decline of these practices.

From the book we also learn that "modern houses in the cities, and even in large villages, are furnished with gas; where gas is not used, sperm-oil, kerosene or coal-oil, and candles are employed" (362). She goes on to point out the expense of sperm-oil,

apparently attributed to the decline of the whale population. Kerosene was invented in 1854 and was the more economical choice of the two. As far as the availability of gas, once again we must consider Beecher's optimism. Most readers would not have gas in their homes for some time; few could afford it before the end of the century (Strasser, 71).

Increasingly, more cooks were using stoves instead of fireplaces. Beecher notes, "The most common modes of cooking, where open fires are relinquished, are by the range and the cooking-stove" (69). She goes on to cite reasons for her preference of stoves over ranges, mainly that the range, requiring larger amounts of fuel and effort, is the less economical of the two.

And at a time when most people lived without indoor water sources, and privies and chamber pots were realities, Beecher advocated an upstart idea in waste management, the earth-closet, which was essentially an indoor commode using clay and dry dirt to absorb material and odor. The dirt could later be removed for fertilizer. Beecher promotes earth-closets as superior to water-closets, noting their economy, "The earth-closet is much cheaper, besides being an accumulator of valuable matter" (403). However, earth-closets were not widely instituted, generally attributed to the difficulty of obtaining the large amounts of dry soil required for their use. And although Beecher includes indoor plumbing in her plans for an ideal house (40), it would not be widely available, like gas fuel, until after the end of the century.

Still, searching for traces of technology in *The American Woman's Home* allows us to gain some sense of the conveniences, or lack thereof, available, to housekeepers during the mid-nineteenth century. And it is interesting to speculate why Beecher

promotes technologies which at that time were beyond the means of most of her readers. One reason might be simply due to the perspective of her upper-middle class vantage point. Another could involve a utopian fascination with technology; she clearly states her intent to include “the latest results of science” in the introduction. But another possibility is based on her writing style. Beecher is visionary, forward-thinking, and optimistic. It would be keeping in the spirit of her writing to plan for coming technologies, to set ideals in housing designs and hope her readers might aspire to them. Also, individual ideology influences the presentation of technology, as well. Part of Beecher’s agenda is women’s education, and in teaching them about currently available technology, she is working toward fulfilling that purpose. And evidence of the writer’s instructional purpose is further proof that this writing qualifies as technical writing.

Analyzing *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking*

The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking, published in 1881 by Helen Stuart Campbell, is a representative housekeeping manual from the late nineteenth century. Like the other writers, Campbell (1839-1918) had also published successfully before writing *The Easiest Way*. Around 1862, she began writing children’s stories, and later, adult novels. In the following decade, she became involved in the burgeoning field of home economics, which lead to a teaching position at the Raleigh Cooking school. There, she wrote *The Easiest Way*, first published in 1881, issued as a revised edition in 1893, and re-printed by a different publisher in 1899. Also during the early 1880s, she helped establish a

cooking school in Washington D.C. From 1882 to 1884, she was household and literary editor for *Our Continent* magazine. Throughout her life, she wrote and lectured extensively on domestic science and social issues.

According to Matthews, Campbell turned to home economics after receiving a graduate education in economics. "Campbell's career pattern provides further evidence for the contention that the discipline of home economics came into being in large part because talented women were invariably ascribed to studying the home" (152). The rise of home economics as discipline increasingly brought households under the same principles of the new "scientific management" influencing business and industry. Accordingly, early home economists during this time emphasized scientific methods, emphasizing application and methodology. As we will see, this book moves away from the style of Beecher's theoretical essays to practical directions based on scientific research. Further evidence of the influence of the new home economics discipline is apparent in the sub-title *Adapted to Domestic Use, or Study in Classes*; the book could be used in the increasing number of classes devoted to the study of domestic science. At the close of her introductory chapter, Campbell states "we are but on the threshold of the new science," (9) indicating a book representative of a time of further change in the burgeoning field of domestic science.

Campbell's Style and Presentation of Ideology

In the introductory chapter, Campbell states her reasons for writing *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking*, despite even her own initial skepticism for the need of yet another housekeeping manual: "to teach household science as well as cooking" (6).

She found earlier manuals attempting both “so cumbersome in form and execution as to daunt the average reader” (6). Her approach, then, would be different, “systemizing the subject,” presenting the immense subject “concisely yet clearly and attractively” (7). Comparing the contents of the three books under study, we see that Campbell has eliminated topics discussed at length in the others, such as the duty to charity, dangers of amusements, and advice for the poor. In the other two books, the chapters dealing with those topics were essentially essays promoting Christian values, aimed more at the housekeepers than their homes. That Campbell chose to focus on practical advice makes this book representative of its time, reflecting the increasing emphasis given to science in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when principles of “scientific management” were being applied to businesses and industry. Likewise, because home economics was an inchoate academic discipline, early educators in the field emphasized scientific ties to establish credibility. And housekeeping ideology evolved under the influence of home economists. The shift, then, was away from the feminine aesthetic fostered by Victorian attitudes to one of business and scientific principles, underscored by masculine values. And Campbell’s book, with its focus on procedure and technique, exemplifies this transition. So, considering Campbell’s stated purpose, it seems fitting to discuss the ideology that might have informed that decision as well as its influence on her writing style.

The author’s awareness of her audience, the different types of readers who will use her book, is apparent from the book’s introduction. She acknowledges “the young housekeeper, beginning with little or no knowledge” (7) who can learn how to care for the entire home, not just the kitchen. Campbell also considers other readers, indicated in her

description of the cooking section. Citing earlier cookbooks whose recipes were too vague or required ingredients beyond the means of most ordinary readers, she set out to present “the line of receipts most needed in the average family, North or South” (8). In the first chapter, she states, “what is written here applies chiefly to country homes” (11), going on to say that although her advice is applicable to city dwellers, too, most Americans live in the country, or in small towns with some land around their homes. This demonstrates the author’s intent to write for “typical” American readers, as she defines them. However, she also designs her book for use in the classroom, stating to her desire “to facilitate the work of the teacher” (8). The book, in fact, concludes with *Hints to Teachers*, including lesson plans and exam questions.

Campbell establishes ethos by relaying how, as a cooking teacher, she too was overwhelmed by the massive and often conflicting amounts of information on housekeeping. Increasingly, she relied on “my own personal experience as a housekeeper, both at the South and at the North” (7); this establishes her as an experienced homemaker, and therefore a credible authority on the subject. Additionally, she mentions her credentials as a teacher, including her experience establishing several cooking schools. Clearly, these examples illustrate the author’s intent to establish herself as an authority in the field.

Considering Campbell’s desire to present the necessary information in this enormous field in a concise manner, we should expect her writing style to follow suit. The author is quick to point out what her book does *not* cover, referring to other sources for more in-depth information. For example, in discussing a house’s arrangement, she begins,

“This is no hand-book of plans for houses, that ground being thoroughly covered in various books” (17), calling to mind the plans Beecher includes in *The American Woman’s Home* for her version of an ideal house. Similarly, while explaining the need for extra nutrition during a child’s formative years, Campbell adds, “This is hardly the place to dwell upon the amount of knowledge acquired from birth to five years of age” (82). Overall, she emphasizes the practical.

Although Campbell eliminates information she deems too elaborate for the discussion at hand, she does not fail to provide specific detail where appropriate. In the introduction, she found fault with previous cookbooks for lack of specificity in their recipes. Looking at a typical recipe verifies her commitment to detail; she includes specific measurements for ingredients and ordered directions for combining them. In other areas, such as her instructions for laundry, she includes a variety of procedures for treating different stains, such as ink, wine, and rust (56). Throughout the book, Campbell judiciously selects details when they are needed to help her readers perform household tasks.

Similarly, she uses metaphor to increase readers’ understanding of her topics. For instance, she compares skilled workers, such as carpenters, who arrange their work-spaces for the most efficient work, to organized housekeepers. Likewise, Campbell notes, “The kitchen is the housekeeper’s workshop” (18). Explaining the nature of oxygen, she states, “Small as the proportion of oxygen seems, an increase of but one-fifth more would be destruction. It is the life-giver, but undiluted would be the life-destroyer” (20). She uses metaphor for effect to argue that most young women’s lack of domestic skills stems from

a belief that housekeeping is “an instinct as that which leads the young bird to nest-building, and that no specific training is required” (35). At the least, Campbell’s use of metaphor corroborates her as a writer cognizant of her audience.

Another revealing aspect of Campbell’s style is in her emphasis on practical advice, which complements her position on girls’ education. Echoing the sentiments of both Child and Beecher before her, Campbell faults the present lack of domestic education for women: “Every science is learned but domestic science” (15). She also criticizes women for failing to apply their academic knowledge to more practical concerns: “The student, who has ended her course of chemistry or physiology enthusiastically, never dreams of applying either to everyday life” (16). Given that Campbell was an educator in the dawning days of home economics, when early proponents sought to establish credibility, it is not surprising she held these views.

Also in terms of style, her tone is conversational, a little less formal than Beecher’s. And although Campbell also incorporates the imperative mood, her tone sounds less severe than Child’s. For example, in directions for the care of oil lamps, she softens her list of commands, alternating from imperative directions, “Keep the wick turned high enough to burn freely” with suggestions, “Remember, that, as with the fire, plenty of fresh air is necessary for a free blaze” (49). Starting her directions with “remember that,” implies respect for the readers’ knowledge, as if to say, “Bear with me if you already know this,” and also seems a tactful way to instruct readers unfamiliar with the procedure. Her writing demonstrates clarity, with sentences typically conveying one idea; this is a hallmark of technical writing.

Campbell's Format and Organization

We should consider Campbell's aim to write a thorough yet concise book on housekeeping: is it organized or formatted in such a way to support that purpose? Overall, *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking* incorporates more formatting to aid in accessibility than the earlier books studied. This formatting might be attributed to print innovations that were widely used by the end of the 1800s. The book starts with a table of contents listing chapter titles and their corresponding page numbers in an easy-to-read tabular format. Chapters start on a separate page from the preceding one, although this may fall on a left or right folio. Formatted similarly to Beecher's book, chapter titles are in a typesize larger than the text's, in all uppercase, centered, preceded by its corresponding roman numeral centered above. Titles of chapters appear at the top of each page, providing readers orientation. Likewise, pagination appears in upper outer corners of each page. Near the end of the book, a chapter, *Hints to Teachers*, contains separate sections consisting of plans for twelve lessons, a list of references, and final exam questions. The book concludes with an index whose alphabetical listings have sub-entries in list form; for example, the entry for Cake includes an alphabetical list of the different types of cake recipes in the book. Each appears on one line, with its referring page number. Having these entries in a list, rather than in paragraph form, supports readability.

Although *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking* appears as text-heavy as the other two books, it has more formatting to break up the text. Like the previous books, the formatting is characteristic of technical writing. Campbell makes liberal use of tables and lists; for instance, she provides nutritional analysis, such as the composition of cow's

milk, in tabular form (81). Similarly, when discussing the body's composition, she uses a table, *Analogies of the Steam-Engine and the Living Body*. Arranged in two columns, one designated for the steam engine, the other for the animal body, she compares their intakes (fuel, water) and outputs (heat, energy) as a numbered list. In the first column, number one lists the steam engine's fuel, coal and wood; in the second, number one lists an animal's fuel, plants and meat (68). From my own example, the table conveys the information more readily than a textual description alone. Choosing to present information in a visual format, such as a table, represents a rhetorical choice by the author, indicating audience awareness. In short, the table presents the information more concisely, or to appropriate Campbell's term, in "the easiest way."

Furthermore, the book's organization aids in presenting the information thoroughly yet concisely, as Campbell desired. From the onset, she acknowledges the daunting nature of earlier household manuals, perhaps such as Beecher's, that attempted to be almost *too* inclusive, especially in theory. Separating the theoretical from the practical pares down unwieldy topics, as Campbell demonstrates throughout the book. For example, chapters on general nutritional theory and health (*The Chemistry of Animal Food*) precede chapters on specific food groups (*Meats*), which in turn contain sections containing individual recipes (Beef a la Mode). Moving from the general to the specific is logical for teaching new material; dividing the topics into separate chapters allows readers to read to suit their needs. Readers looking for specific information, for example, how to prepare veal, can bypass the preceding information on nutrition and the effects of eating meat because they appear in separate chapters.

Also in terms of organization, the ordering of the chapters seems well considered. Campbell begins her book with chapters devoted to housekeeping. In this section, she begins with a chapter on the location and arrangement of the house, literally a discussion of where to build a house followed by advice for a general layout. The next chapters consider providing a house with adequate ventilation and water supply. Only then does she turn to the topic of house-cleaning. The rationale seems to be that people must first have a house before they can clean one. Actually, Campbell provides insight into her inclusion of those initial chapters: "The essentials [in the choice of any home] are: a wholesome situation, good ventilation, good drainage, and a dry cellar. Rich or poor, high or low, if one of these be disregarded, the result will tell, either on your own health or on that of your family" (12-13). This indicates the author's endeavor to educate readers in the basics of owning a home, once again starting with the general, moving to the specific. The book's organization, like its formatting, demonstrate Campbell's aim to present her information "concisely." And this, too, is typical of technical writing.

Campbell's Writing about Technology

Once again, the writer's aim to instruct readers on technological practices is characteristic of technical writing. As with the earlier books, searching *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking* for technological references offers insights into daily living during the time the book was written. Like the other authors, Campbell emphasizes tasks that occupy most of the housekeeper's day, such as cooking, which required tending a fire, so we can find signs of technologies involved with those tasks. During this time,

stoves have all but replaced cooking in a kitchen fireplace, and Campbell praises the benefits, "The modern stove has brought simplicity of working and yet the highest point of convenience, nearly to perfection" (45). She mentions the use of gas but comments on its limited availability. Although cooking in stoves made heat easier to regulate than cooking over open fires, they still did not produce exact temperatures. In a recipe requiring oven-baking, instructions read: "Bake in an oven hot enough to brown a teaspoon of flour in one minute" (203). Also regarding cooking, Campbell includes tips for marketing, indicating meat was purchased rather than routinely butchered at home. She also mentions "the new process flour" (200), which "swells more than that by the old" (201), requiring less amount in recipes.

In terms of technologies in the home, kerosene is "the oil most largely used for lamps" (48), demonstrating its increasing availability after the publication of Beecher's book. Although Campbell describes water-closets connected by pipes to an outdoor cesspool (34), this was probably an ideal rather than common arrangement. In fact, she mentions it in a discussion on the importance of clean water, as one method to avoid ground-water contamination. Historically, indoor plumbing was not widely available at this time. Strasser notes the United States commissioner of labor's report in 1893 on urban living conditions, which cited statistics for city-dwellers without indoor plumbing. In Baltimore, as many as eighty-eight percent of the population had access only to an outdoor privy; among other cities, New York City was best, but still reported fifty-three percent in similar conditions (97). More reflective of her time, Campbell describes how most people dug wells or carried water from pumps in town (33). Even considering that

some technologies portrayed in the book, such as gas and indoor plumbing, were new and not widely available, we still get a sense of how housekeepers did their jobs, and what innovations they could anticipate to help them with their work.

Comparing the Three: How They Work As Technical Documents

Examining these three housekeeping books reveals features common to technical manuals, especially in terms of format, organization, and style. Characteristic of technical writing, the books have formatting features, such as hierarchical headings, table of contents, and indexes, to facilitate accessibility. These are incorporated to varying degrees in each book. For instance, Child's does not include a table of contents, while Beecher's and Campbell's books do. Beecher's table provides subtopics for each chapter, in paragraph form, which is perhaps not the most effective format for readability. On the other hand, this arrangement provides a thorough overview for the chapter. Her index is similarly formatted, with sub-entries listed in paragraph form. In terms of readability, this paragraph format seems less effective than Campbell's index, whose sub-entries appear indented, in list form. For page headers, Child's book indicates either one of two major divisions for the book, which provides only general information; furthermore, there are the enigmatic numbers that seem to correlate to chapters, but without a table of contents or other listing of chapters, it is difficult to know for sure whether you are reading a chapter or a sub-topic within a chapter. Both Beecher's and Campbell's books include appropriate chapter headings at the top of pages, improving accessibility. All three books contain some

type of back matter aimed at helping the reader. For example, Child's contains an appendix of brief recipes and helpful hints, which compensates somewhat for the difficulty in referencing information in the rest of the book; however, this section is not alphabetized. Beecher includes an alphabetical glossary of terms, while Campbell provides lesson plans for teachers. All of these sections have something in common: they provide additional, useful information for readers. Their inclusion, then, demonstrates consideration of the readers.

While Child's book does not contain any visuals, both Beecher's and Campbell's do. Beecher's has illustrations, figures, and floor-plans. Most of the illustrations are decorative, such as those accompanying chapter title pages, although the figures and floor-plans clarify complex information. In contrast, Campbell's visuals are completely functional, conveying textual information: there are tables and lists of scientific data, such as nutritional analysis. In short, visuals in both books function to convey information more readily than can be explained in the text. Their inclusion represents another rhetorical consideration by the author. In conclusion, these books qualify as technical manuals, in part, because of their formatting.

In terms of organization, all three authors arrange their information topically, offering advice and methods specific for the topic under discussion, such as cooking. While they provide varying degrees of background information—the educational or theoretical part of their books—most of their information is methodology: techniques and procedures to perform household tasks such as cooking, laundry, and sewing. This procedural writing, common in all three books, is technical writing in both its

characteristics and purpose. Characteristically, the procedures are mostly imperative sentences listed in the order to be performed, with some formatted as a numbered list. The purpose is educational, but the focus is on technique — *how to do something* — rather than on the theory informing the practice.

This is not to say that these books, as technical manuals, fail to educate. As we have learned, all three authors felt strongly about the need for women's education. Campbell echoes both Child and Beecher before her when she observes that men go through an apprenticeship before entering their profession, unlike women, whose daily schedule "would confound the best-trained man of business" (36). As we have seen, all three writers have educational purposes apparent in their writing. They anticipate the preliminary material readers will need, prefacing procedures with basic information. This practice follows a hallmark of good writing, particularly in manual writing: move from the general to the specific, providing adequate background information. This technique creates cohesion in writing, which enhances its clarity.

Certainly, these authors differ in the amount of information they deem "background." Child is the most concise of the three, offering simple advice and only occasionally providing any additional information: "Woollens [sic] should be washed in very hot suds, and not rinsed. Lukewarm water shrinks them" (14). Notice how the final sentence almost seems an afterthought. In contrast, Beecher has greater expectations for her readers and the amount of knowledge they need. Judging from her writing and examining her ethos, it seems she was not content to simply instruct her readers to perform household tasks; she sought to educate them in *everything* they might encounter

as housekeepers. This is consistent with the ideology she presents. As Matthews notes, "Child had leaped from topic to topic in a rather unsystematic fashion. Conversely, Beecher attempted to give an organized and exhaustive compendium of everything that a housewife might need to know, replete with the latest scientific information wherever applicable" (48). Consequently, with Beecher, before a discussion on the benefits of exercise, we find anatomy facts, including detailed descriptions of the muscular and circulatory systems and how they work. Still, all her meticulous preliminary information is to prepare readers for the task at hand, whether caring for the sick or planting a garden. Falling somewhere between the other two, Campbell admits to limiting the amount of background information she provides. Frequently she prefaces a discussion by stating her assumptions of her readers' knowledge or her decision not to include more in-depth information: "I shall take for granted that you have a fairly plain idea about the stomach and its dependences" (63). She focuses on the practical, reflecting a shift in the ideology of housekeeping toward scientific management, with its emphasis on science and efficiency. Scanning the press notes included in the beginning of her book, we find repeated reference to its *practicality*; one even calls it "a very useful manual" (3). So, the organization of these books, their ordering of content and presentation of information, reflects ideologies prevalent when they were written. Their organization, arranged topically, and purpose, to educate, emphasizing the practical, are also characteristic of technical writing.

If these books seem wordy by today's standards, we should remember their historical context. Education was still fairly limited for women, especially in the first part of the century. These authors were most likely aware of the wide range of educational

levels among their readers. Also, the books belong to a tradition of advice books, where people of limited means can better themselves through self-education.

In terms of style, all three authors seem cognizant of their audience. Note how they perceive their books uniquely American, offering advice specifically aimed at American readers. Both Child and Beecher title their books to reveal this perspective, while Campbell mentions her intent to write for typical Americans. Other scholars have written about this American scope, including Tonkovich, who discusses how Beecher explicitly frames her book with an American context, differentiating its class system from that of Europe (93). Additionally, we can speculate on what features the writers thought made their books “American,” if we remember the historical context. Their readers, unlike Europeans, had less consistency in available conveniences and technology, owing to different stages of settlement in the country. Similarly, Americans required recipes and remedies that incorporated native ingredients. Also worth noting, given the burgeoning nation, Americans experienced more economic and social fluctuations, affecting class mobility; simply put, the American system was not as structured as Europe’s. Both Child and Beecher seem aware of this situation and address readers finding themselves in a different socio-economic class: Child, in her criticism of people living beyond their means, and Beecher, in her chapters such as *Domestic Manners*. In short, limiting their focus to American practices is yet another indication of rhetorical consideration by these writers.

Their advice, written in a conversational tone, is directed *at* the reader. The sentences are mostly declarative, conveying information, or imperative, listing commands. This style, too, is characteristic of technical writing. As noted, Beecher’s writing seems

more expository than the other writers', which is in part due to some of her topics pertaining to moral instruction. As we have seen, each book's tone corresponds to its particular ideology. To illustrate, Matthews compares Child and Beecher, using the latter's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, the book that inspired revision into what would become *The American Woman's Home*:

To compare the tone and content of Lydia Maria Child's *American Frugal Housewife* of 1829 with *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) offers a valuable perspective on the elevated status of home at mid-century. Child had given common-sense advice in a matter-of-fact tone with only a modicum of philosophizing about what the optimum home might be. Beecher, on the other hand, began with extensive quotations from Alexis de Tocqueville on the role of American women. . . . Beecher then employed these remarks as the starting point for her own program for American women, a program which was both domestic and political from the first page. (47-48)

She goes on to discuss how the ideology of Beecher's day gave way to a culture of professionalism in the late nineteenth century, exemplified by early home economists, such as Helen Campbell: "If their discipline were to be a profession at all, they would do their best to emulate existing male professions. The most important step was to distance themselves from that lowly amateur, the housewife" (150). Consequently, we see an emphasis on science in Campbell's book, exemplified by her in-depth nutritional tables.

Each writer's style, as much a matter of individual choice, is no doubt also reflective of the historical context, including the prevailing ideology of the time.

By comparing the three books, we can also get a sense of the technological advances that affected housekeepers and their work. For instance, we find evidence of the introduction of the cooking stove, first referenced in *The American Frugal Housewife*, whose recipes could be adapted to fireplace or stove cooking. By the late nineteenth century, Campbell anticipates cooking with gas-fueled stoves in the not-too-distant future. Similarly, we find references to what people used for indoor light, tracking the declining use of candles along with the more frequent use of oil lamps. Child refers to lanterns and comments on the decline of candle-making but includes instructions to make them. Whereas Beecher similarly comments on this fading practice and includes instructions for making them, she also notes the growing preference for kerosene over sperm oil for lanterns. Later, Campbell comments that kerosene is the most widely used lamp oil and foresees the coming use of gas. Given that her book was aimed at people living in rural areas, who might adhere to the vestiges of bygone practices, it is interesting to note that she does not mention candle-making, and this is perhaps indicative that the practice truly was antiquated.

And yet, some household chores remained essentially unchanged during the nineteenth century. Take, for example, washing clothes, which is discussed in varying degrees in all three books. Doing laundry was typically an all-day affair involving preparations the night before, giving rise to the phrase "Blue Monday." According to housekeeping historians, women deemed laundry their most arduous task, involving

hauling water and heating it over a fire, and the process of doing laundry was essentially untouched by technology throughout the nineteenth century. Strasser notes, "Without miracle fabrics, washing machines, or detergents, getting clothes really clean was a complicated process, described in almost identical detail by Catherine Beecher in 1841 and Helen Campbell forty years later as the 'common mode of washing'" (105). Since Strasser refers to Beecher's *Treatise*, we can use Campbell's directions to get a sense of what was involved in doing laundry (55). First, the housekeeper sorted clothes by color and material and soaked them overnight, then, starting with the least soiled clothes, took each load through a series of several washings, first scrubbing with soap, then placing them in fresh water to boil. Finally, she rinsed the clothes in water with bluing, followed by another with starch for items to be ironed, then wrung them thoroughly and hung them on a line to dry. Once the first load was completed, she would start with the next. Apparently, laundry was done fairly much the same way in the early nineteenth century, too. Child, in her typical manner, offers separate, brief hints for soaking, ironing, and tackling stains. In a telling example, she advises, "Soap your dirtiest clothes, and soak them in soft water over night" (17). She also offers a number of hints for removing different stains. The difficulty of doing the wash prompted both Beecher and Campbell to mention an alternative: sending it out. Beecher presents an idea for families to combine the money spent on laundry (fuel, soap, starch, and irons) and create community laundries: "Whoever sets neighborhood-laundries on foot will do much to solve the American housekeeper's hardest problem" (334). Although the idea did not develop exactly as she envisioned, by the end of the century women were routinely sending their laundry to other women willing to take on the

extra work for pay. As Campbell acknowledges, there were “plenty of needy and unskilled workwomen who can earn a living in no other way being ready to relieve us” (54). In the case of laundry, noting a *lack* of technological innovation can also broaden our understanding of the work required of nineteenth-century housekeepers. In order to classify these books as technical manuals, however, it is enough to point out that their aim is to impart technology—specifically, technological practices—and their technical content characterizes them as technical writing, as does their format, style, organization, and instructional purpose.

Claiming These Housekeeping Books as Technical Writing

These three housekeeping books can be considered workplace manuals given their historical context. In the nineteenth century, women worked primarily at home; although some women, such as these writers, found gainful employment outside the home, they were not in the majority. So the home was the workplace for most women in the nineteenth century. These books, then, with their how-to emphasis on performing tasks around the house, served as housekeepers' workplace manuals.

Reading these books provides us insights into the daily lives of housekeepers during the nineteenth century. Each book is representative of an era during that century, *The American Frugal Housewife* from the first half, when American housekeeping books were relatively new; *The American Woman's Home* from the pinnacle of an era exalting domesticity following the Civil War; to *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking* from the end of the century, when home economists followed an industry trend of scientific management. Comparing the three books allows us to discover changes in the way housekeepers worked throughout this time period. But a retrospective study also allows us the perspective to discover nineteenth-century attitudes toward housekeeping. We recognize the reciprocal nature of influence between authors and readers; it is realistic to think that in their writing, these authors represented, at least to some degree, prevailing

attitudes toward women and domesticity, and it follows that we can assume that a number of readers were influenced by the portrayals of housekeepers and housekeeping presented by the authors. How accurately do the authors depict nineteenth-century housekeepers? By comparison, what assumptions would we want future historians to make about us based on reading one of Martha Stewart's books? The point is to remember authorial bias while searching for less subjective clues. For instance, looking at a recipe with directions for cooking in a fireplace, we can deduce that this technology, fireplace cooking, was obtainable during the time period. But as we learned from earlier examples, we must again consider the author's assumptions about "available" technology: are they realistic? Even finding that the conveniences mentioned are forthcoming for the book's original readers nevertheless allows us to construct a time-line of technologies available to housekeepers to consider what they had, or did not have, to help them with their work.

As we have seen with the example of laundry, many of the chores that would benefit most from technological innovation remained virtually unchanged throughout the century. And although the stove rendered significant changes in cooking, it still required women to haul wood or coal and tend fires. Ruth Cowan argues in her aptly named book, *More Work for Mother*, that household technologies have actually created *more* work for women. It is a compelling theory worth analyzing, although beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, we can more fully consider technology by looking for traces of it in historical books such as these. And a primary consideration is that these books are *technical* because they impart then-current technology to their readers, which reveals the writers' instructional aims.

Considering my initial definition of technical writing, these housekeeping books qualify as technical manuals. Like technical manuals, they are formatted for accessibility, with typography, headings, indexes, and glossaries, to name a few. They share organizational patterns corresponding to technical manuals, with information arranged topically. Style varies widely in technical writing, as it does among these writers. Common to all are conciseness, clarity, and accuracy (to the best of their knowledge), characteristics of good technical writing. Similarly, the writers frequently compose imperative sentences for instructions, yet another trait common in technical writing.

Furthermore, these books are "writing to do," designed to help their readers perform a task, a procedure. To accomplish this purpose, they are necessarily educational, providing the background information determined appropriate by the authors. The books provide an extensive amount of preliminary information that might seem superfluous by today's standards but would have been appropriate considering their context. And providing general information to orient readers before moving to new information creates cohesion, an important element in all writing but particularly significant in technical writing.

Additionally, these books impart technology in their procedures for using then-current conveniences. This, too, designates them as technical writing. So does their functional purpose, perhaps most significantly. With practical emphasis, these books offer procedures for performing work in the home, the workplace for the majority of women in nineteenth-century America. As workplace manuals, they belong to the genre of technical writing, where they take their place as historical examples.

What, then, is the value of examining historical technical writing? First, it helps expand our notions of what constitutes technical writing. We can discover a multitude of texts that help people perform tasks, which then allows us to analyze the rhetorical strategies writers used in these texts to motivate and educate their readers. This analysis helps us understand that technical writing is part of a long tradition, practiced for centuries; this understanding makes us better-informed, and hopefully, better writers. But perhaps most importantly, historical research underscores the humanistic value of technical writing, because it reveals the primary aim of technical writers: to communicate with their readers, to help them learn, to help them work.

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